

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
ROCK CREEK FENCE PROJECT  
JOHN DAY LOCK AND DAM  
Klickitat County, Washington**

**INTRODUCTION**

The John Day Lock and Dam Project is located near Rufus, Oregon on the Columbia River. The project was built and is operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE), and began operation in 1968. The project was authorized for the purposes of power, navigation, irrigation, and flood control. The John Day Dam creates a 76-mile long impoundment (Lake Umatilla) that extends upstream to the McNary Dam.

Rock Creek is a tributary to the Columbia River (Lake Umatilla) and is located in Klickitat County, Washington. As part of the John Day Lock and Dam Project, the COE owns and manages the area from the mouth of Rock Creek upstream including Rock Creek Park, a 126-acre recreational site. The current Land Use Plan Designation for this area is for wildlife management. Although currently classified for wildlife management, the area continues to support recreational opportunities including fishing, hunting, picnicking, boating, wildlife viewing, and hiking. Rock Creek supports important fishery, cultural, and scenic values. The property boundaries are unmarked and open (unfenced). As a result, trespass livestock use has increased on COE lands and is detrimental to natural and cultural resources stewardship.

**NEED AND PURPOSE FOR ACTION**

The COE property on the lower Rock Creek is adjacent to privately owned ranch lands. The land use on adjacent lands is principally cattle ranching. Trespass livestock grazing on COE property is causing damage to riparian zones on Rock Creek. Lack of a delineated property boundary impairs on-the-ground management, resource protection, and law enforcement. Potential impacts to fisheries, water quality, and cultural sites may occur without additional protection from trespass livestock and other unauthorized uses. The COE proposes to construct a four-strand, barbed wire fence along approximately four miles of the property boundary to reduce livestock trespass and other unauthorized uses.

**PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

**Proposed Action**

The proposed action is the construction and installation of a four-strand barbed wire fence along the COE property boundary on the Rock Creek project area. The fence would delineate the property boundary, control trespass livestock, protect natural and cultural resources, and improve operation and maintenance activities.

**No Action Alternative**

Under the no action alternative, there would be no construction of a boundary fence. There would be no physical delineation between public and private lands. Trespass

livestock would continue to degrade the Rock Creek riparian area. Potential impacts to fisheries, water quality, and cultural resources would likely occur.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **General**

The physical, biological, and human environment for the John Day Lock and Dam were described in detail in the Final EIS completed in 1975 (COE, 1975). Additional information can be found in the Master Plan (COE, 1976). Both documents are on file in the Portland District Office, and are incorporated by reference into this environmental assessment.

### **Physical**

Rock Creek flows through a canyon area and enters into a back bay of Lake Umatilla at approximately RM 226. Steep slopes are encountered within the canyon area. Columbia River basalt underlies much of the project area. Sedimentary deposits composed of several formations overlie much of the basalt bedrock. These deposits consist of silt, sand, gravel, and volcanic ash. Soils typically fall into the Walla Walla-Starbuck and Ritzville-Starbuck series. Portions of Rock Creek are currently listed on the Washington 303(d) list as a Category 4c stream (water quality impaired by non-pollutant) (DOE, 2004).

### **Biological**

Generally, the upland vegetation in the project area can be classified as shrub-steppe and is typical of semi-arid regions. Native species of grasses, forbs, and shrub vegetation generally dominated by bunch grasses and arid-land shrubs such as sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) occur in the area. However, it is difficult to find areas free of alien plant species. Overgrazing and wildfires have disrupted plant associations. In disturbed areas, exotic plant species such as cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) often dominate. The predominant plants include bunch grasses, cheatgrass, bitter brush, rabbit brush, sagebrush, and Russian thistle.

The riparian zone along Rock Creek contains cottonwood, willows, shrubs, sedge, rush, and grass species. The Washington 303(d) assessment indicated that degraded riparian condition is limiting for salmonids in Rock Creek.

Wildlife is typical of the shrub-steppe province with grassland mammalian species such as mule deer, coyotes, skunks, rabbits, and riparian associated species such as beaver, muskrat, mink, and raccoon. Bird species that may be found in the project area include raptors, passerines, California quail, chukar, crows, magpies, ravens, gulls, terns, and waterfowl.

Fish species found in the project area include both resident and anadromous fish. Bass, northern pikeminnow, rainbow trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon are known to utilize Rock Creek.

Threatened species that may be found in the Rock Creek project area include bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). No endangered or proposed species are found in the project area.

### **Cultural**

The mid-Columbia River area has a rich cultural heritage. Since prehistoric times, the Columbia River has played a major role in the cultural development of the Pacific Northwest. The Rock Creek area has several known archeological sites.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

Environmental consequences are expected to be positive. The boundary fence will improve operations and management of the project area. The fence will reduce or eliminate any trespass livestock grazing on the COE property. The proposed project will provide additional protection and management for both natural and cultural resources.

### **Physical**

Although minor disturbance to soils can be expected from fence construction activities, construction and maintenance activities will have no significant effect on soils.

Water quality improvements can be expected from fence construction by eliminating trespass livestock grazing particularly in the Rock Creek riparian zone. With the elimination of trespass grazing, riparian vegetation will recover. Bank trampling and erosion caused by livestock will cease.

### **Biological**

By controlling and eliminating trespass livestock grazing, improvements to vegetation cover and plant species composition will occur over time. This will benefit riparian and aquatic species found in and along Rock Creek.

The proposed action will not affect any endangered species of fish, wildlife, or plants, or their critical habitat. Bald eagle, bull trout, and steelhead are the only listed species that may occur in the project area. None of the listed species will be affected by the construction of a boundary fence.

### **Cultural**

Historic and/or cultural resource surveys have been completed for this proposal. A request for concurrence for this proposal is being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office. The boundary fence will improve management of the area and provide additional protection for cultural resources.

### **COORDINATION**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) will be distributed for 30-day public review. Review comments will be requested from federal, state, and local agencies and groups.

## CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

- a. Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 USC 1344): A Section 404 water quality evaluation would not be required because the proposed action would not involve the placement of fill material in waters of the U.S.
- b. Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended: Not applicable.
- c. Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended: The proposed action would have no effect on threatened or endangered species. This determination has been coordinated with Federal and State resource agencies.
- d. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act: The proposed action has been coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in compliance with this Act concurrent with the review of this EA.
- e. Wild and Scenic Rivers Act: Not applicable.
- f. Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972, as amended: No marine resources would be affected by the proposed work.
- g. Cultural Resources Acts: Consultation for compliance for Section 106, National Historic Preservation Act as amended, is being obtained.
- h. Executive Order 11988, Flood Plain Management, 24 May 1977: The proposed action would have no adverse effect on flood plains or flood heights.
- i. Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, 24 May 1977: No wetlands would be affected by this project.
- j. Analysis of Impacts on Prime and Unique Farmlands: The proposed work would not impact any prime or unique farmlands.
- k. Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). The proposed action would not be affected by the requirements of this Act.

## LITERATURE CITED

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District, Construction, Operation and Management Umatilla-The Dalles (Final EIS), April 1975.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District, John Day Lock and Dam Master Plan (Design Memorandum No. 25B), July 1976.

Washington Department of Ecology, WA 303(d) List, [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/303d/2002/2002\\_list.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/303d/2002/2002_list.html)), (web accessed June 2, 2004).